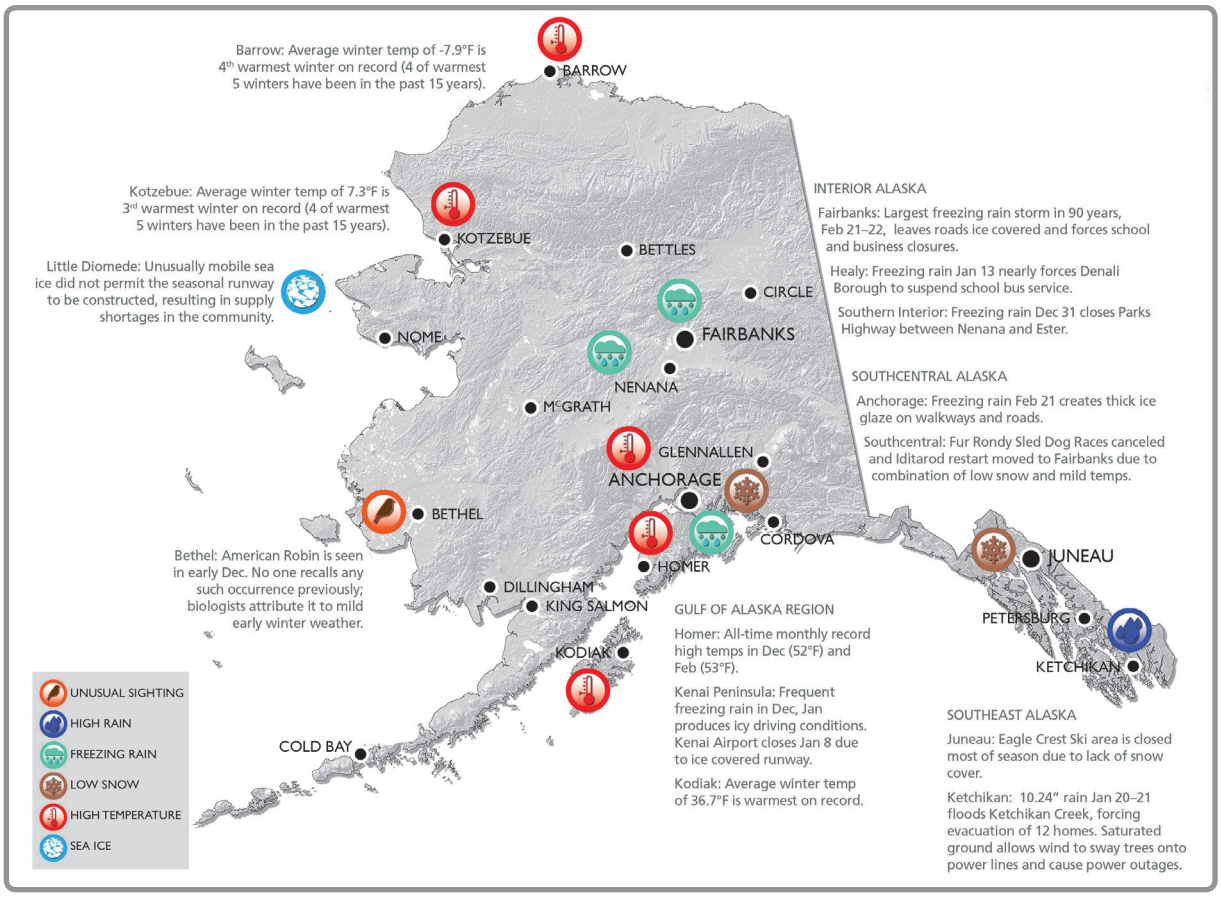
Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook

Alaska Region

Winter 2014–2015

Alaska - *Weather and Climate Highlights December 2014–February 2015*



Significant Regional Impacts *for December 2014–February 2015*

Persistently mild temperatures and a lack of snowfall wreaked havoc across southern Alaska during the winter of 2014–15. The Open World Championship sled dog races as part of Anchorage's annual celebration were canceled. The ceremonial start of the Iditarod sled dog race took place in Anchorage, but the restart had to be moved to Fairbanks due to lack of snow in both Southcentral and the Dalzell Gorge and Farewell Burn areas near the Alaska Range.

In northwest Alaska, temperatures this past winter averaged almost as mild as the near record warm 2013–14 season. At Little Diomede, sea ice in the Bering Strait remained mobile and did not permit construction of a seasonal runway, resulting in supply shortages at the only community in the state without a permanent landing strip.

Many parts of Alaska south of the Brooks Range had some freezing rain during the winter. Fairbanks was soaked with a quarter inch of rain on February 21–22, closing the Fairbanks airport for more than 12 hours, glazing roads, and forcing school and business closures on the 23rd. This makes four of the past five winters that have brought significant freezing rain to the central Interior.

Freezing rain occurred repeatedly through the winter across Southcentral and the Kenai Peninsula. Most schools in the Mat-Su Borough were closed December 10 due to freezing rain, while the Kenai Airport closed for several hours on January 8. The freezing rain was especially heavy February 21 in the Anchorage urban area. Freezing rain also caused problems in Bethel and Valdez in January. Southcentral ski resorts were able to open but with reduced activities. At Alyeska, only 25 inches of snow fell December–February, compared to the normal of 125 inches.

Southeast Alaska was exceptionally wet in January, with Juneau Airport recording the wettest January there in more than 70 years of observations. Little Port Walter, on the southern end of Baranof Island, received more than 4 feet of rain during the month. At Ketchikan, more than 10 inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period stretching from January 20 into the 21st, causing flooding of Ketchikan Creek and forcing the evacuation of more than a dozen homes. Gusty winds during this storm caused some power outages as rain-soaked ground allowed trees to topple onto power lines. In spite of the copious precipitation, snow levels were consistently very high, with Eagle Crest Ski Area near Juneau largely closed due to bare ground on the upper slopes.

The mild winter weather was likely a factor in out-of-season bird sightings in the state. In early December, many people in the Bethel area saw an American robin out of season. In Juneau, thrushes were seen repeatedly during February. In both cases these appear to be "first time in memory" of these traditionally summer birds being seen in these areas during mid-winter.

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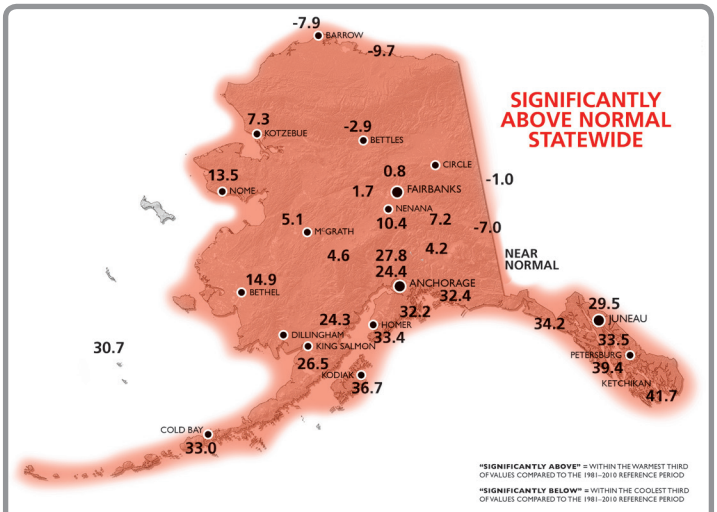
Regional Highlight - *Temperatures Significantly Above Normal*

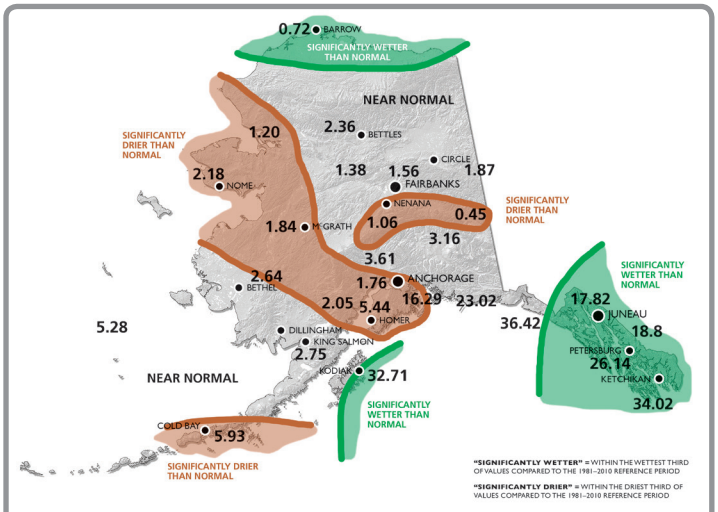
Temperature and Precipitation Anomalies

Alaska Statewide Temperature Anomalies
December 2014–February 2015



Data and analysis are preliminary and subject to revision

Alaska Statewide Precipitation Anomalies
December 2014–February 2015



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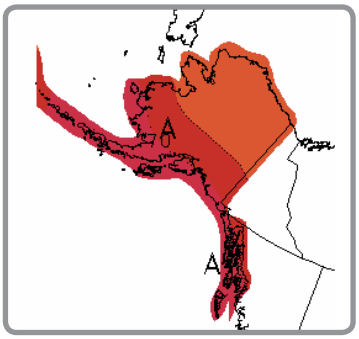
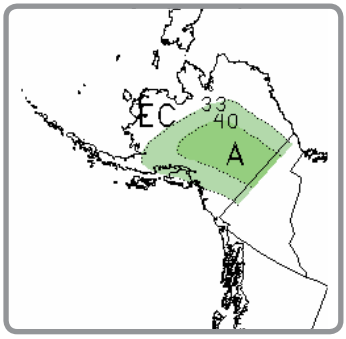
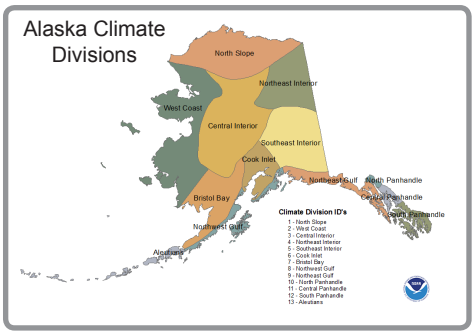
Regional Outlook *for April–June 2015*





The outlook for April through June calls for strongly elevated chances of significantly above normal temperatures across all of Alaska. With the winter snowpack near or below normal, this raises the prospect of early melt-out and an early start to the wildfire season. Significantly warmer than normal temperatures in April and May will reduce the risk of moderate and major ice jam flooding, especially in Southcentral and Southwest Alaska, where the snowpack is well below normal. The outlook calls for slightly increased chances of significantly above median precipitation over the central and eastern Interior and parts of Southcentral. Impacts of more precipitation will depend on timing and the nature of the precipitation, especially on thunderstorm activity during late May and June.

NOAA implemented 13 climate divisions for Alaska on March 6, 2015, which allows Alaskans to partake in many of the products and services provided by the National Centers for Environmental Information, Regional and State Climate Centers, and other producers of climatological information for Alaska. The research, development, and implementation was an excellent example of collaboration that spanned academia, federal, state, and local/tribal entities.



Alaska Region Partners

Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy
www.accap.uaf.edu

Alaska Climate Research Center
http://climate.gi.alaska.edu/

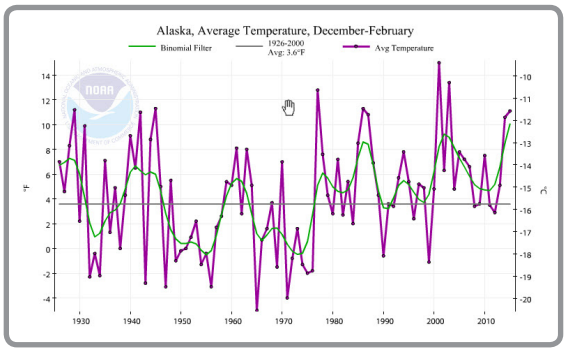
Alaska Climate Science Center
http://www.doi.gov/csc/alaska/index.cfmg

Cryosphere Today (University of Illinois),
http://arctic.atmos.uiuc.edu/cryosphere/

NOAA/NWS Weather Forecast Offices in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau

NOAA/NESDIS/NCDC
www.ncdc.noaa.gov

Scenarios Network for Alaska and Arctic Planning
www.snap.uaf.edu



The mid-winter (December through February) of 2014–15 was, for Alaska as a whole, the seventh warmest in the past 90 years. This continues the warm pattern of the 21st century, with no winters since 1998–99 being significantly colder than the long-term (1925–2000) average. This mid-winter was slightly milder than last winter thanks to the very mild December (fourth warmest on record) and the persistence of above normal temperatures in January and February.

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